

## Public Comments.... Example

### Background Information:

At Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in Montana, 6,000 to 8,000 head of cattle per year graze refuge lands, impacting wildlife habitat and threatening the reintroduction of the endangered black-footed ferret. This is a key issue that the Refuge Manager must address in the CCP for this refuge.

### Example Statements:

The following two quotes are from public comments concerning this key issue.

1. "Don't even think about allowing cattle to graze on the refuge. Stop all current grazing activities".
2. "I think some of the Refuge should allow for small amounts of cattle grazing".

In preparing a CCP, refuge managers and planners must revisit existing commercial and recreational uses that may be harmful to wildlife and evaluate any newly proposed uses to see if they are "compatible" (do not interfere with or detract from the purposes of the refuge).

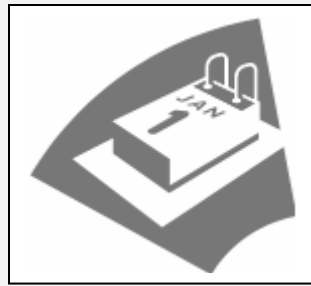
### Additional Resources:

The Citizen's Wildlife Refuge Planning Handbook –  
<http://www.defenders.org/pubs/refuge00.html>

Comprehensive Conservation Plans: Coming to a Refuge Near You!  
<http://www.refugenet.org/New-issues/ccp.asp>

## In Summary. . . .

- ✓ It is important to remember that the entire "Planning Process" is driven by biological objectives! - **"Wildlife First"**
- ✓ Public issues and concerns can influence management direction! Please use our comment sheet to submit public comments.
- ✓ The CCP document preparation is part of the public record!



### Tentative Planning Schedule

- January 2006: Develop management alternatives, including the "proposed action"
- February 2006: Public Meeting on the management alternatives
- April 2006: Release and distribute Draft CCP/EA
- January 2007: Public Meeting on Draft Plan
- October 2007: Release and distribute Final CCP/EA

### Additional Information/Comments

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ADA compliant materials will be provided upon request.



### Planning Process

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is in the midst of a planning project for Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The resulting document will be a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP/EA), which will include our strategies for managing fish and wildlife habitats, conserving rare, threatened and endangered species, and providing priority public uses on the refuge.

The CCP will serve as a practical guide for managing the refuge for the next 15 years. We will complete a draft CCP/EA in the spring of 2006 which we will distribute for public review and comment. Prior to developing the draft CCP/EA, we will be holding a series of public scoping meetings to receive public comment on key issues surrounding the management of the refuge.

This planning project provides a unique opportunity for the Service to involve individuals and local communities in the long-term management of our National Wildlife Refuges. By attending this and other public meetings you can play a significant role in the development of this far-reaching plan. So please provide us with your written comments.

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Fern Cave and Sauta Cave National Wildlife Refuges (NWR's)

### Public Scoping Meeting – Scottsboro, AL September 20, 2005

#### Fern Cave Description

Fern Cave NWR was purchased in 1981 to provide protection for the federally endangered gray and Indiana bats. It consists of 199 acres of forested hillside underlain by a massive cave with many stalactite and stalagmite-filled rooms. The cave has five hidden entrances with four occurring on the Refuge. Fern Cave contains the largest wintering colony of gray bats in the United States with over one million bats hibernating there in the winter.

Spectacular features' including unrivaled formations, important paleological and archaeological finds, and a diverse cave fauna have contributed to Fern Cave as being described as the most spectacular cave in the U.S. The endangered American Hart's-tongue fern also occurs on the Refuge.

#### Purpose & Legislation

"... conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species... or (B) plants..." (Endangered Species Act of 1973).

#### Sauta Cave Description

Sauta Cave NWR (known as Blowing Wind Cave NWR until 1999) is a 264 acre Refuge purchased in 1978 to provide protection for the federally endangered gray and Indiana bat and their critical habitat. The cave provides a summer roosting site for about 200,000 - 300,000 gray bats and a winter hibernaculum for both the gray and Indiana bats. There are two entrances into the cave on the Refuge but they are closed to the public.

As is the case with many large caves, rare and unique species occur in Sauta Cave. As a result, the Alabama Natural Heritage Program ranks the cave's biodiversity as a site of very high significance. In addition to the rare fauna within the cave, the federally endangered Price's potato bean occurs on the Refuge.

#### Purpose & Legislation

"... conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species... or (B) plants..." (Endangered Species Act of 1973).

Find us on the web:  
<http://www.fws.gov/wheeler/>



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<p><b>Why Is This Planning Effort Starting Now?</b></p> <p>In October 1997, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act was passed. This Act clarifies the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and identifies national priorities and management emphasis. The mission of the Refuge System is:</p> <p>“To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans”</p> <p>National priorities and management emphases are to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.) maintain biological integrity, diversity and health on refuges;</li><li>2.) provide appropriate priority public wildlife-dependent activities of hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, interpretation and environmental education , where compatible;</li><li>3.) assess the compatibility of all public uses with the purpose for which the refuge was established; and</li><li>4.) <b>prepare Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs)</b> for each National Wildlife Refuge.</li></ol>	<h2>Refuge Vision Statement (Draft)</h2> <p><i>The Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex will protect, manage, and, where appropriate, restore native systems of lands and waters to provide habitat for wildlife, fisheries, and plants within northern Alabama for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations of Americans. The Wheeler NWR Complex contains crucial habitat for the survival of migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and other wildlife, fish, and plants.</i></p> <p><i>The Wheeler NWR Complex will seek partnerships that promote environmental stewardship on non-refuge lands, foster research opportunities to enhance resource management and restoration efforts in the Lower Tennessee-Cumberland Ecosystem, and protect historical and cultural resources located on the Wheeler NWR Complex. When compatible, wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, interpretation, photography, and environmental education will be provided while promoting the public’s understanding of the purposes of the Wheeler NWR Complex and the mission of the NWR System.</i></p> <h2>Refuge Goals (Draft)</h2> <p><b>GOAL 1: Fish and Wildlife Population Management</b> <i>Protect, maintain, enhance, and restore viable populations of migratory birds and native wildlife, fish, and plants including all federal and state threatened/endangered species found within the Wheeler NWR Complex in a manner consistent with applicable state and federal laws, regulations, plans, initiatives and international treaties.</i></p> <p><b>GOAL 2: Habitat Management and Restoration</b> <i>Protect, maintain, enhance, and restore optimum habitat for the conservation of migratory birds and native wildlife, fish, and plants including all federal and state threatened/endangered species found on the Wheeler NWR Complex in a manner consistent with applicable state and federal laws, regulations, plans, initiatives and international treaties.</i></p> <p><b>GOAL 3: Resource Conservation and Protection</b> <i>Facilitate cooperation among agencies, organizations and individuals to enhance effective management and protection of natural and cultural resources within the Lower Tennessee-Cumberland Ecosystem in Alabama.</i></p> <p><b>GOAL 4: Provide Education and Visitor Services</b> <i>Provide the public with wildlife-dependent recreation and educational opportunities to foster an appreciation and support for natural resources and conservation.</i></p> <p><b>GOAL 5: Refuge Administration</b> <i>Provide administrative support necessary to ensure that the goals and objectives for fish and wildlife populations, habitats, resource protection and conservation, and visitor services are achieved for the Wheeler NWR Complex.</i></p>

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<h2>Public Meeting Rules</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Please turn all cell phones/beepers off!</li><li>▪ Hold one conversation at a time.</li><li>▪ Please wait to be recognized by the moderator.</li><li>▪ Be respectful to others, no personal attacks.</li><li>▪ Participants agree to disagree. The point of this scoping meeting is to foster open discussion of issues. In order to facilitate this we need to respect other’s right to disagree.</li><li>▪ The CCP will try to address issues raised by the public that are contradictory – i.e., too much public use versus not enough public use facilities.</li><li>▪ Some issues will not be addressed because they are “off refuge” issues and not under our control. i.e trying to change existing laws or regulations. We cannot change laws or regulations.</li></ul> <h2>Public Comments.... Getting Involved</h2> <p>You can help us focus our planning efforts on those things that matter to you and your community. Your comments will assist us in identifying the best alternatives for long-term management of the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge.</p> <p>A comment sheet has been mailed out to everyone on our current mailing list and will be handed out to everyone who attends the public meetings. Comment sheets will also be available at the Wheeler NWR Visitor Center and the Refuge Headquarters during regular business hours.</p> <p>The comment sheet provides an effective way for us to hear your ideas and concerns on important issues affecting the Refuge. Feel free to add any additional comments in the space provided, give us a call, Email, or write us at the address provided on the last page of this fact sheet.</p> <p>The comments we receive will help us identify issues and develop goals and objectives. Comments should be focused on “key issues” and not on personal complaints.</p>	<div><p><b>REMEMBER “WILDLIFE FIRST”</b></p><p>National Wildlife Refuges are the only system of federal lands established specifically for wildlife conservation.</p><p><i>“...The fundamental mission of our refuge system is wildlife conservation: wildlife and wildlife conservation must come first.”</i></p><p>(In House Report 105-106, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997)</p><p>Wheeler NWR will evaluate all public comments and suggestions; however in making final management decisions, “Wildlife First” will be our number one priority.</p></div> <p><b>Our goal</b> is to prepare a CCP/EA within the next two years.</p> <p>Specifically this plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ outline refuge management operations and priorities for the next 15 years;</li><li>▪ identify and describe significant resources and their importance in a regional and national context;</li><li>▪ identify how the Service can best protect resources;</li><li>▪ clarify what public uses are compatible while managing significant issues;</li><li>▪ identify the Refuge’s role within local communities and as a national resource</li></ul> <div></div> <p><b>Your Comments are Very Important to Us!</b></p> <p>Please provide all comments in writing.</p>